

\$4.8 million allotted to state charter schools

FORT COLLINS — The state of Colorado will receive millions of grant dollars to develop high-quality charter schools, thus providing Colorado parents with additional educational options for their children, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige announced June 28.

On behalf of Paige, Deputy Secretary Gene Hickok presented a \$4.875 million grant check to Assistant Commissioner of Education Gary Sibigroth during an event with Rep. Marilyn Musgrave at the Liberty Common Charter School in Fort Collins. The check provides funds to Colorado for the first year of the three-year program.

"Across the nation, charter schools are proving that a focus on results, combined with greater freedom for educators and more choices for parents, leads to better education for students," Hickok said. "I am thrilled that Colorado has the opportunity to embrace these innovations and hope to see charter schools continue to blossom throughout the state over the next few years."

The competitive grants are part of the No Child Left Behind Act's Charter Schools program, which supports states' efforts to plan, design, operate and distribute information about charter schools.

Colorado will use the grant to support efforts to increase student achievement and develop high-quality charter

schools. During the next three years, Colorado's low-performing schools will be required to either reconstitute or convert to charter status.

States with charter school laws may apply for the grants. Ten states will share more than \$71.7 million in grants. Other states to receive grants are California, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Texas.

Charter schools are independent public schools of choice designed and operated by educators, parents, community leaders and educational entrepreneurs. They are given greater flexibility in return for strict accountability for improving student achievement.

The first U.S. public charter school opened in 1992. Almost 3,000 charter schools serve nearly 750,000 students in 37 states and Washington, D.C.

The No Child Left Behind Act is the bipartisan landmark education reform law designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap between groups of students, offering more flexibility to states, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works. Under the law's strong accountability provisions, states must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those with disabilities, achieve academically.

Rep. hosts check presentation

WASHINGTON D.C. — Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., hosted a June 28 ceremony for the presentation of \$4.85 million to Colorado's charter school system from the U.S. Department of Education.

Deputy Secretary of Education Dr. Eugene Hickok presented the funds to the Colorado Department of Education at Liberty Common Charter School in Fort Collins.

"Charter schools have been extremely successful in Colorado and new charters are being opened at an increasing rate," Musgrave said. "I am pleased that this grant award will provide a tangible means for parents and children to access new educational opportunities through charter schools."

Colorado has been opening new charter schools at a faster rate over the last three years than previous, making this competitive grant, which the

state will use to start nearly 20 schools over the next year, critical. The \$4.85 million is for the first of three years. The money will allow charter schools to be opened and provided sustainable funds for three years, to ensure their success.

Musgrave has been an advocate for charter schools in her service as the only Colorado representative on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, because they provide students a valuable alternative to other public schools. Charter schools also allow for greater parental involvement in their children's education.

"As a former school board member, teacher, and mother of four, I understand the value of parents that are active in their children's learning, and the importance of teaching in a smaller, more driven classroom environment than many large public schools offer," Musgrave said.

President Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposes almost \$320 million for charter schools, a 24 percent increase over 2004.

The charter school grants program is part of the Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement, which Sec-

retary Paige created in December 2002 to make strategic investments in and widely distribute information about promising education practices. The office also leads efforts to provide information to parents about the options the No Child Left Behind Act affords them.